Of Spinster Ladies and Flowers
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Douglas Nichols

OF SPINSTER LADIES AND FLOWERS

Around a rose the elderly ladies spin,
Like witches now, and now like powdered lovers,
Like ancient mothers, bewhiskered and very wise:
Grey-haired Miss Gertrude, with terrifying eyes
To match her down-east voice, I see deliver
The witches' lines at table and make me cringe.

She scared me out of sense another time:
I saw her lean from her chair and never move,
Wide-eyed and drooling. . . . She was hospitalized:
I brought her violets, remembering how she prized
Her flowering beds and bushes. She asked of love
Only a blanket of roses at burial time.

Old ladies fall in love with younger men:
Miss Lucy wheezed from asthma but never wearied
Of summer playing: Up in Maine we'd skim
The lake in a green canoe and then come in
For luncheon in her garden. I gave her merely
A sprig of lilac once—which still could win

Her kindergarten heart. And now in Rome
The plump *padrona*, busying herself like Mother,
Brings flowers daily. Today she overflows
With pinks and a French saying, "J'aime deux choses,
Toi, et la rose." She bids me pledge one other
Heart with a rose before I leave for home.

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O rose, O heart, O ladies with the ache
Of love remaining: I am bewitched by you.
Out of the air you spin your charms and fears
Of all depriving, muttering, smiling—in tears
For would-be love, for love that is not true:
I honor the rose for you and the heart's sake.

ROMAN SPRING

Out of the depths of Rome, out of the Forum
Up to Villa Borghese where Apollo
Touches Daphne at just the arboreal moment,
You feel in spring the marriage of man and nature.

You hear it in song praising the sun's new shining
Across the court, after the long rain.
You see it in ruins where daisies freshen the columns.
O water is one of the gods of Rome, the sun

Another. These cause the apple tree to bloom
Near the Borghese. The lovers stroll in gardens
Where judas, cherry, overhang the tulips
Nodding from nurtured beds. You walk the Pincio

Down to the Spanish Stairs: The banked azaleas
In whites and pinks and reds, a wedding arrangement,
Marry the spring with Rome. You see Apollo
Pursuing Daphne until she becomes a tree. . . .

But that was laurel, baroque. Here the Romans
Pause on the steps, smelling the sweet azaleas.
They lean toward girls dizzy with spring and love,
Daphne and Apollo recede like a dream in air.

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